

SCRIPTURE IN MEMORY

Jesus' command of Scripture suggests that He took memorization very seriously.

One of the many things that captured the interest of Christ's disciples was His fervent and consistent devotional life. The Gospels, especially Luke, illuminate the importance of prayer for Jesus. His followers were inspired by the spiritual power they had come to associate with His words and works. While His life in the Spirit stemmed from several sources, it also included His intent to store Scripture in memory. This ingredient in Christ's spiritual life is not as explicitly described as His life of prayer, but is evident in the record of His earthly ministry.

It has been observed that the Gospels (particularly Matthew) describe Christ as the perfect representative of the people of Israel, who

repeats the history of the Old Testament covenant people. God called both Israel and Christ—as the embodiment of Israel—His “servant” (Isaiah 42–53). Both similarly received the designation of God’s “Son” (Ex. 4:22; Matt. 3:17). Like Israel of old, Jesus found refuge in Egypt for His own survival. The first chapters of Matthew’s Gospel repre-

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sent Jesus as retracing the steps of Israel, experiencing a “new Exodus” from Egypt after a death decree. Christ then makes a spiritual journey, crossing a figurative Red Sea at the time of His baptism. As the pillar of cloud went before Israel to lead them in the desert, so Jesus was “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Matt. 4:1, NKJV). There He resided 40 days in the desert, paralleling the 40 years Israel wandered in the wilderness. As Moses proclaimed the law of God’s kingdom on Mount Sinai, so did Jesus, the great Law Giver, proclaim His spiritual kingdom on the Mount of Blessing (Matthew 5).

Jesus later selected 12 disciples as the counterpart of the 12 tribes of Israel. Notice that Jesus faced the same temptations in the desert as did Israel during their time of wandering: “appetite,” “love of the world,” and “presumption.” It’s significant that Christ recognized that passages quoted by Satan were out of their immediate context and only partially quoted (Matt. 4:6, 7; Ps. 91:11). He overcame all these temptations by quoting passages from memory from the Book of Deuteronomy. The precepts in this book, many written in the desert, had also been available to Israel in the wilderness as they struggled with temptation (Deut. 8:3; 6:13, 16). In other words, Jesus used the very same weapon available to Israel as they battled temptation. Christ had evi-

dently, through years of careful application and study, fortified His memory in preparation for this intense battle with the adversary.

The Gospels exalt many facets of the life of the Messiah as an example for those who are His followers. The Gospels record no fewer than 43 occasions when Jesus quoted or alluded to Scripture from memory. His purpose for quoting the Scriptures seems to fall into three categories: (1) as an aid in His battle with sin, (2) to clarify a doctrinal question for His hearers, and (3) as a confirmation or clarification of His mission as the Messiah.

The Scriptures sustained Jesus during the trying ordeal at the closing hours of His life. Of the “seven last words” of Jesus on the cross, passages quoted by Jesus during the closing hours of His betrayal and crucifixion were Psalm 22:1 (Matt. 27:46); and Psalm 31:5 (Luke 23:46). Another statement, “I thirst” (John 19:28), though not a direct quote, is contextually parallel with events described in Psalm 22:15 and 69:21. In the midst of His terrible suffering, under the weight of the sins of the world, He quoted (in Aramaic) Psalm 22:1: “‘‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’’’” (Matt. 27:46, NKJV). Even the last spoken words of Jesus before He died, “‘‘It is finished,’’” were words of Scripture that He had committed to memory.

Jesus understood, from His med-

itation on Scripture revealing His Messianic work, that He was the new antitypical David, repeating in His life the experience of the first David.

All three Old Testament texts quoted by Jesus on the cross came from the psalms of David. It is appropriate that Jesus would identify Himself with David, who had hidden the Word in his heart (Ps. 119:11). Probably no other Old Testament character declared a stronger devotion to the words of the Lord. It was David who said, “I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word” (Ps. 119:16, NKJV). Jesus also made this resolution, and it sustained Him in His final hours. As the Davidic Messiah, it is no wonder that Jesus armed Himself with the words of Psalm 22 and other relevant verses from the Psalter. He gained encouragement as He witnessed how the events described in the Psalm so closely paralleled events happening before His eyes.

The Gospel narratives contain additional parallels with the experience of David in the Psalms: They mocked Christ on the cross (Ps. 22:7; Matt. 27:39). The tormentors tempted Him to deliver Himself (Ps. 22:8; Matt. 27:43). Christ suffered

great thirst on the cross (Ps. 22:15; John 19:28). His hands and feet were pierced (Ps. 22:16. His garments were parted and taken by casting lots (Ps. 22:18; Matt 27:35). The Savior’s naked faith, hanging on the words of Scripture, energized Him with courage to face the crisis before Him.

The closing days of Jesus’ betrayal, trial, and passion are thematically parallel to the betrayal, deception, and hardship that the Gospels prophesy will come upon the final remnant (Matt. 10:16–18, 22–25, 40; 24:9, 10). Ellen White declares: “Today men are choosing Barabbas, and saying, Crucify Christ. They will do this in the person of His saints. They will go over the same ground as the Jewish priests and rulers did in their treatment of Christ” (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 131).

In the same manner, the people of God, before the day of the Lord, will be “like David” (Zech. 12:8). Like the Davidic Messiah, they will draw upon the storehouse of Scripture during Earth’s final conflict. The end-time generation will face a similar trial and will use the same means to overcome through the Word of God. □

